

HOW TO BRING A PETITION ARTICLE TO TOWN MEETING

What is a petition article?

A petition article is an article brought to Town Meeting for discussion and possible action by a citizen, (rather than by a Board or Committee of the Town). Any person or group can bring a petition article on any topic that is relevant to action by Amherst Town government. In the past there have been petition articles dealing with zoning, expenditures and social justice resolutions.

What is the process for getting a petition article on the Town Meeting Warrant?

Petition articles begin with a form available from the Town Clerk's Office. On the form, print or type (or tape a printed version of) your proposed article in the space provided at the top of the page. Photocopy as many petitions as you need if you intend to ask others to help you collect signatures. The number of signatures required to get an article on the warrant varies depending on whether the Town Meeting is an Annual Town meeting (i.e., Spring Town Meeting where the budget is passed), a Special Town Meeting (including Fall Town Meeting), or a Special Town Meeting within a previously called Town Meeting (e.g., if the warrant has already been set).

The required number of signatures for each of the above are:

- **Annual Town Meeting: 10 valid signatures required**
- **Special Town Meeting: 100 valid signatures required**
- **To call a Special Town Meeting** (or a Special Town Meeting within a previously scheduled Town Meeting) to consider an article or articles: **200 valid signatures**

To be valid, a signature must be from a registered Amherst voter. When collecting signatures, first ask if the person is registered to vote in Amherst. Sometimes people will mistakenly say they are. For this reason, always collect more signatures than are actually needed. Collecting signatures is also a good way of educating the public about your proposed article.

What do I do with my petition once I collect the required number of signatures?

Petitions should be turned into the Select Board Office. Be aware that whoever turns in the signatures will be the person whose name is listed next to the petition article at Town Meeting. If the petition proposed is from a citizen group, the group's name might be listed, but not necessarily; the Select Board office could instead choose to list the name of the person delivering the petition. It is therefore important to think about whose name you would want listed on the warrant next to this article.

What are the deadlines for bringing a petition article to Town Meeting?

The deadlines for citizen petition articles are set by the Select Board. If it is a zoning article, the deadline will be earlier than for miscellaneous articles. Deadlines are posted on the Town's website, www.amherstma.gov.

What happens after I drop off the petition article at the Select Board Office?

After you hand in your petition form, you should begin preparing for the next series of events:

- 1) **The Warrant Review:** The Warrant Review is a meeting for Town Meeting members and residents where articles are explained briefly, without advocacy. The Town Meeting Coordinating Committee and the League of Women Voters co-sponsor the meeting. It is aired and replayed many times on the Amherst Community Television (ACTV) Channel 17, so it is a very important opportunity to educate the public and Town Meeting members about the purpose of your petition article. You will probably be contacted by

the committee, but if you do not receive a call well in advance of the meeting, you may want to contact them yourself. If you are allowed to speak at the Warrant Review, you will be kept to a certain number of minutes. Be sure to time yourself in advance to make sure your presentation will fit the time limit. You may also want to have visuals to go with your presentation. An overhead projector and a laptop for power points will probably be available, but you should check ahead of time to make sure.

- 2) **Information for the Town Meeting packet:** Consider preparing a handout for one of the two packets mailed to Town Meeting members in advance of Town Meeting. Contact the Select Board Office for the deadlines for the packets, the number of pages permitted and the number of copies to supply. The Select Board office does not make copies for you. If you provide a copy of your handout electronically to the Town Meeting Coordinating Committee, it will be made available online on to Town Meeting members that subscribe to the TMCC listserv. Send it to townmeeting@amherstma.gov .
- 3) **Bus Tour:** If your petition article relates to a zoning article or some other issue that has a physical place to visit associated with it, you should contact the Town Meeting Coordinating Committee to inform them of this. If the Bus Tour subcommittee chooses to include your stop on the tour you may want to be present on the tour to give a brief explanation (without advocacy) while the bus is at the site. The Bus Tour, like the Warrant Review, is a great chance to educate the public and Town Meeting members. The Bus Tour is replayed many times on ACTV.
- 4) **Presentation of the article:** The Moderator reads the article as printed in the Warrant and asks for a motion under the article. A Town Meeting member, usually the sponsor of the article, comes to the podium and makes the motion. After it is seconded, the article is presented by one or more speakers who may or may not be Town Meeting members. Let the Moderator know in advance, who will make the motion and who the presenter will be. If s/he is not a member of Town Meeting, that person will need to get a non-voter sticker from the member's check-in. Presenters sit either in the front row to the left or in the balcony. If a non-Town Meeting presenter is in the balcony when it is time to present the article, they should stand at the top of the left aisle, easily visible to the Moderator who will ask Town Meeting to vote permission for that person to speak.

The presenter of an article comes to the microphone, introduces him/herself by name and precinct, and then has 5 minutes for the presentation which may include visuals such as materials on the overhead projector or power points. During debate of the article, presenters are usually allowed to sit on the stage steps or in the front row so that they are able to provide more information if a question is raised by Town Meeting members. After the initial presentation, each speaker is allowed three minutes only. Be sure to watch the timer since time limits are strictly enforced.

For more complete information, consult the League of Women Voters **Town Meeting Handbook** on the League web site, www.lwvamherst.org. The rules and procedures of Town Meeting are explained on pages 11 – 21, and additional helpful information to those interested in preparing petition articles can be found on pages 24 – 32.